

Evaluation of the Indianapolis Mayor Sponsored Charter Schools

The Excel Center-West Second Year Charter Review

2014-2015 School Year

Mary Jo Rattermann, Ph.D.

OFFICE OF EDUCATION INNOVATION

Office of the Mayor of Indianapolis SECOND YEAR CHARTER REVIEW

The Excel Center-West

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The Office of Education Innovation Second Year Charter Review (SYCR) is designed to assess the second year of the school as it develops and refines the policies and procedures to be used in the future. The Second Year Charter Review Protocol is based on the *Performance Framework*, which is used to determine a school's success relative to a common set of indicators, as well as school-based goals.

Consistent with Office of Education Innovation Performance Framework, the following four core questions and sub-questions are examined to determine a school's success:

Is the educational program a success?

- 1.1. *Is the school's academic performance meeting state expectation, as measured by Indiana's accountability system?*
- 1.2. *Are students making sufficient and adequate gains, as measured by the Indiana Growth model?*
- 1.3. *Does the school demonstrate that students are improving, the longer they are enrolled at the school?*
- 1.4. *Is the school providing an equitable education to students of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds?*
- 1.5. *Is the school's attendance rate strong?*
- 1.6. *Is the school outperforming schools that the students would have been assigned to attend?*
- 1.7. *Is the school meeting its school-specific educational goals?*

Is the organization in sound fiscal health?

- 2.1. *Short term Health: Does the school demonstrate the ability to pay its obligations in the next 12 months?*
- 2.2. *Long term Health: Does the organization demonstrate long term financial health?*
- 2.3. *Does the organization demonstrate it has adequate financial management and systems?*

Is the organization effective and well-run?

- 3.1. *Is the school leader strong in his or her academic and organizational leadership?*
- 3.2. *Does the school satisfactorily comply with all its organizational structure and governance obligations?*
- 3.3. *Is the school's board active, knowledgeable and abiding by appropriate policies, systems and processes in its oversight?*
- 3.4. *Does the school's board work to foster a school environment that is viable and effective?*
- 3.5. *Does the school comply with applicable laws, regulations and provision of the charter agreement relating to the safety and security of the facility?*

Is the school providing the appropriate conditions for success?

- 4.1. *Does the school have a high-quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?*
- 4.2. *Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?*
- 4.3. *For secondary students, does the school provide sufficient guidance on and support and preparation for post-secondary options?*
- 4.4. *Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?*
- 4.5. *Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?*
- 4.6. *Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?*
- 4.7. *Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?*
- 4.8. *Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?*
- 4.9. *Is the school properly maintaining special education files for its special needs students?*
- 4.10. *Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to English as Second Language (ESL) students?*

COMPLETION OF THE SECOND YEAR CHARTER REVIEW

As part of its oversight of charter schools, the Office of Education Innovation of the Mayor of Indianapolis has authorized Research & Evaluation Resources (RER) to conduct site visits of schools in their second year of operation. The purpose is to present the school and the Office of Education Innovation a professional judgment on conditions and practices at the school, which are best provided through an external perspective. This report uses multiple sources of evidence to understand the school's performance. Evidence collection begins before the visit with the review of key documents and continues on-site through additional document review, classroom visits and interviews with any number of stakeholders. Findings provided by the site visit team can be used to celebrate what the school is doing well and prioritize its areas for improvement in preparation for renewal. It is the task of the site visit team to report on the following pre-identified aspects of the *Performance Framework* and to assist the Office of Education Innovation in its completion of the SYCR Protocol: ***Responses to sub-questions 4.1- 4.10 of Core Question 4.***

The outcome of this review will provide the school with written a report that includes a judgment and supporting evidence on various aspects of the school, based on a rubric of indicators¹ developed for each of the four core questions and sub-questions in the *Performance Framework*. The assessment system utilizes the following judgments:

Does not meet standard

Approaching standard

Meets standard

¹ Rubric indicators are subject to revision by the Office of Education Innovation.

Background of The Excel Center- West

As one of The Excel Center's the school specific goals proposed for The Excel Center-West are motivated by the philosophy of “relationships, relevance, and rigor.”

- Students in The Excel Center will develop supportive relationships with staff and fellow students to encourage their progress and academic engagement. They will be grouped into teams that meet bi-weekly to support each another, debrief challenges of balancing school and life concerns, and celebrate learning achievements and milestones. In addition, Excel Center coaches will facilitate these teams and meet with students to promote their continued education. These coaches will monitor progress, and where necessary, work with students to find solutions to particular life challenges that might hinder student progress.
- Students' education will be **relevant** to their educational and career goals. Every student will develop an individual learning plan based upon his or her unique interests and abilities. The Excel Center will provide students the opportunity to connect the material they learn to skills that are helpful and necessary in work environments. Remedial and basic high school coursework will be balanced with tangible skills training that focuses on improving students' employability. Students will enroll in local post-secondary institutions and take the first steps towards earning some form of post-secondary degree or credential. Students – many of whom will be first-time college students – will benefit from The Excel Center's support and encouragement as they learn to navigate and succeed in post-secondary learning environments.
- The **rigor** of The Excel Center coursework is designed to prepare students to graduate from high school and be prepared for post-secondary learning environments. Students who participate in The Excel Center will complete all requirements of one of the recognized State of Indiana high school diplomas. In addition, students will prepare for and demonstrate skills necessary to be successful in post-secondary education.

Additional Student Supports

In addition to providing academic and life skills supports, The Excel Center also offers students assistance with managing their educational goals while fulfilling the needs of their families and themselves. Specifically, The Excel Center provides:

- A Learning Well health clinic for all students is provided by The Marion County Health Department. Students can receive health screenings and treatment for health concerns. A Learning Well nurse is physically present in school administrative offices to meet students for appointments during the school day.

- Goodwill Education Initiatives operates a food pantry where students and their families can pick up food, personal hygiene items and other staple goods. Students can use these resources to meet short-term needs if food security is a barrier to student success.
- Cummins Behavioral Health provides students with comprehensive mental health services. GEI contracts with Cummins to provide these assessment and treatment services for any students in need of additional health supports.
- The Excel Center provides a resource area that is open six days a week, beginning as early as 7am and closing as late as 10pm. The room is staffed by licensed teachers, resource staff and volunteers to answer students' questions and provide one-on-one instruction.
- The Excel Center provides a daycare center for the children of students currently working toward their degree.

The Excel Center Method

The Curriculum. Based on experiences in the first year of operation at the Michigan Street location, the curriculum of The Excel Center was dramatically changed from a focus on individual learners using online curriculum, to more structured 8-week long courses that include direct instruction, group work and independent projects. These 8-week courses offer accelerated coursework and allow students to complete anywhere from 4 to 16 credits in one 8-week session. In addition to the more traditional courses such as Algebra I and English 10, The Excel Center staff has designed hybrid, cross-discipline courses, such as American Studies and World Studies that address several of the requirements for a Core 40 diploma.

iExcel. The iExcel program is an intensive orientation and matriculation process that has been implemented since the 2011-12 academic year. The iExcel program incorporates traditional orientation activities such as course selection, standardized testing and academic counseling, with a unique set of activities designed to give the teaching staff the opportunity to get to know each student as an individual and to allow the students to get acquainted with their classmates. iExcel, which occurs over two days, also gives The Excel Center staff the opportunity to impress upon prospective students the amount of work required and the commitment necessary to succeed at The Excel Center.

Life Coaches. The Life Coaches provide essential support for students by removing roadblocks to academic progress through counseling, social support and everyday advice on topics as diverse as transportation, finding safe housing, childcare, and healthy diet. In addition to these vital services, the Life Coaches also play a substantial role in the academic life of the students. The Life Coaches meet regularly with the teaching staff and are important partners with the teaching staff to the benefit of the students.

The Evaluation Process

This report represents an evaluation about performance in each of the standards and indicators that are the responsibility of RER to evaluate. These indicators: 4.1 - 4.10 are outlined in the Performance Framework.

Research & Evaluation Resources staff engaged in a number of evidence-collecting activities. The focus of this evaluation was to gauge perceptions of key stakeholders at the school in relation to the areas of the performance framework that are part of the evaluation. RER conducted focus group discussions with students, staff, and parents, as well as interviews with the school administration. These focus groups and interviews were conducted October 29 & 30, 2014. Nine classroom observations were also performed on site using the classroom observation instrument provided by the Office of Education Innovation. The on site observations lasted approximately 30 minutes, and over half of the teaching staff was observed once. Classroom observers spent 4.65 hours (279 minutes) observing 9 classrooms, 127 students, and 9 teachers. On average, each observation lasted 31 minutes and the observed student to teacher ratio was 14:1. Two of the teachers were observed by both classroom observers at the same time in order to ensure inter-judge reliability.

In the following report, standards and indicators are listed with relevant evidence given related to the performance criteria. Following the discussion of each indicator, a summary of strengths and areas for attention are provided for the core question. The Excel Center sites each operate with a remarkable degree of autonomy; however, there are aspects of their operations that are the responsibility of Goodwill Educational Initiatives. In recognition of this arrangement, Standards 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 will be evaluated at the level of GEI and the supports it provides to The Excel Center-West, while standards 4.2, 4.7, 4.9 and 4.10 will be evaluated for the Excel Center-West.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

THE EXCEL CENTERS

<i>Core Question 4: Is the school providing the appropriate conditions for success?</i>	<i>Finding</i>
<i>4.1. Does the school have a high-quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?</i>	Meets Standard
<i>4.2. Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?</i>	Meets Standard
<i>4.3 For secondary students, does the school provide sufficient guidance on and support and preparation for post-secondary options?</i>	Meets Standard
<i>4.4. Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?</i>	Meets Standard
<i>4.5. Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?</i>	Meets Standard
<i>4.6. Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?</i>	Meets Standard
<i>4.7. Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?</i>	Meets Standard
<i>4.8. Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?</i>	Not Applicable
<i>4.9 Is the school properly maintaining special education files for its special needs students?</i>	Meets Standard
<i>4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to English as Second Language (ESL) students?</i>	Meets Standard

Standard 4: Is the school providing the appropriate conditions for success?

4.1. Does the school have a high-quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas: a) the curriculum does not align with the state standards; b) the school does not conduct systematic reviews of its curriculum to identify gaps based on student performance; c) the school does not regularly review scope and sequence to ensure presentation of content in time for testing; d) the sequence of topics across grade levels and content areas does not focus on core (prioritized) learning objectives; e) the staff lacks understanding and/or consensus as to how the curriculum documents and related program materials are used to effectively deliver instruction; f) there is a lack of programs and materials available to deliver the curriculum effectively.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) the curriculum does not align with the state standards; b) the school does not conduct systematic reviews of its curriculum to identify gaps based on student performance; c) the school does not regularly review scope and sequence to ensure presentation of content in time for testing; d) the sequence of topics across grade levels and content areas does not focus on core (prioritized) learning objectives; e) the staff lacks understanding and/or consensus as to how the curriculum documents and related program materials are used to effectively deliver instruction; f) there is a lack of programs and materials available to deliver the curriculum effectively.
Meets standard	The school: a) curriculum aligns with the state standards; b) conducts systematic reviews of its curriculum to identify gaps based on student performance; c) the school regularly reviews scope and sequence to ensure presentation of content in time for testing; d) has a sequence of topics across grade levels and content areas that is prioritized and focuses on the core learning objectives; e) the staff understands and uniformly uses curriculum documents and related program materials to effectively deliver instruction; f) programs and materials are available to deliver the curriculum effectively.

No significant concerns were found.

The curriculum at The Excel Centers is actively adapted to the needs of the student population at each of the diverse campuses. The curriculum is common across all Excel Center campuses, with the core learning objectives for each course and the basic objectives designed collaboratively with the teaching staff and leadership from all campuses participating. The majority of this work was done in the summer of 2011, prior to the change in curriculum being fully implemented and the two new campuses opening. The curriculum has continued to be improved and refined through a collaborative process that is overseen by Janet Rummel, Chief Academic Officer for Goodwill Education Initiatives, and includes a team of lead teachers from each of The Excel Center locations. An examination of the curriculum maps revealed that these courses are aligned to the Indiana State Standards (indicator a) but are also in the process of being updated and improved. The current curricular revamp is being performed by curriculum workgroups that are comprised of teachers and leadership from all The Excel Center campuses. Using Blackboard discussion strings as well as regular meetings, the curriculum workgroups post documents, make revisions, and use discussion threads to cover any changes being made.

The leadership at Goodwill Education Initiatives, as well as the Directors at each campus, encourage the teaching staff to adapt the curriculum maps to the needs of their students. During focus group interviews, the teaching staff reported that they felt comfortable adjusting the scope and sequencing of the content to ensure that their students' needs are met, commenting that the curriculum "meets

students where they are and leaves out the material that isn't necessary for the topic standards. We find the focus in key areas so we can move quickly, and it's the curriculum that helps move them (the students) at the pace we need."

They further noted that they work closely with other members of the teaching staff to ensure that material that may not be covered in depth in one course will be covered in subsequent courses. All of the teaching staff reported a focus on ensuring that the material was presented in time for testing (indicator c), with End-of-Course assessment being a particular focus. In those classes that conclude with ECA tests (Algebra I, Biology, and English 10), the curriculum maps are designed to present the information in time for testing, as well as giving the students the skills needed to pass these assessments. Mrs. Rummel also noted that Goodwill Education Initiatives is actively preparing for the new college and career ready assessments, noting that the content and format of these new assessments will be more "real world" and hence in line with the content and philosophy of The Excel Centers. To prepare their students for these new assessments, The Excel Center leadership is "raising the levels of cognitive demand so that they (the students) are interpreting word problems" and taking this into the curriculum revision that is underway to adapt to the new standards and assessments.

A systematic review of The Excel Center curriculum is performed on a regular basis, with a focus in the past being placed on student performance on End-of-Course Assessments. However, as The Excel Center curriculum has adapted to new students and new state standards, the current focus is on revamping the English Language Arts and Math curriculums to meet the new Indiana state standards (indicator b), and on providing a quality education to students learning English as a Second Language. Student assessment data from Acuity Predictive is gathered from all of The Excel Center sites and is then aggregated and examined for gaps in student knowledge and performance. In addition to the questions on the statewide version of Acuity Predictive, Mrs. Rummel noted that they have also adding their own pre-test questions and adding them to Acuity. When added to the data from SRI, Read 180 and the ECA's, The Excel Centers are provided with a comprehensive and current picture of their students' abilities.

Examination of the curriculum documents provided by The Excel Center revealed that the curriculum has clearly prioritized core-learning objectives, and that the sequence of topics across grade levels and content areas is logical and cohesive (indicator d). The curriculum of The Excel Center undergoes rigorous review and revision on a frequent basis to ensure that the instruction is focused on core learning objectives and that the assessments used to determine student knowledge are accurate. Mrs. Rummel and lead teachers regularly engage in a process of developing assessments, ensuring that those assessments are aligned to the curricular content, while also checking for alignment to the appropriate educational standards. Mrs. Rummel and The Excel Centers staff will work course by course comparing questions from the common final exams given at all Excel Center sites, as well as adding questions for the current ECA's and the future Career and College Ready Assessments to the curriculum maps and to the skills they are designed to assess. Each question is projected on a white board and then deconstructed for the skill being tested, the

standard addressed and the knowledge needed to answer it correctly. In this way, alignment to standards, quality of assessment and core-learning objectives are all aligned.

The staff at The Excel Center-West regularly uses curriculum documents and related materials to effectively deliver instruction (indicator e). The Excel Center curriculum combines a focus on accelerated credit recovery, ECA preparation, with an additional school-wide focus on life skills and job placement. The Excel Center leadership and staff have designed a comprehensive program to deliver quality instruction while also removing barriers that may cause the students to stop their education. While the faculty at each site are given some freedom to modify the individual lesson plans, they must maintain the accelerated pace of instruction needed to finish the course in eight weeks, and they must include all the skills and knowledge needed to pass a series of common assessments. These assessments were designed to incorporate the core learning objectives for that course, and cannot be modified by the teaching staff. This arrangement ensures that the teaching staff takes full advantage of the curriculum documents provided by The Excel Center, while still giving them the freedom to use related program materials of their own choosing to differentiate their instruction for the students in their class.

Classroom observations revealed that there are sufficient materials in the classrooms to deliver the curriculum effectively (indicator f). The classrooms were modern and well-lit, there were computer labs available for the students to use, as well as computers in most classrooms. Focus group interviews did not reveal faculty concerns regarding curricular or other materials.

Areas of Strength: The curriculum designed by the staff and leadership of The Excel Center is of very high quality and fulfills the unique needs of the staff and students. The combination of a common curricular core, with the flexibility given to the instructional staff to modify the lessons to meet the needs of their students has proven to be very successful.

The process used to align content, skills and standards through the deconstructing of assessment questions is innovative and effective.

Recommendations: None at this time.

4.2. Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas: a) the curriculum is not implemented in the majority of classrooms according to its design; b) as delivered, instruction is not focused on core learning objectives; c) the pace of instruction/lessons and content delivery lacks the appropriate rigor and challenge; d) instructional activities lack variety and/or limited use of differentiated strategies to engage a wide range of student interests, abilities and learning needs; e) staff do not receive feedback on instructional practices.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) the curriculum is not implemented in the majority of classrooms according to its design; b) as delivered, instruction is not focused on core learning objectives; c) the pace of instruction/lessons and content delivery lacks the appropriate rigor and challenge; d) instructional activities lack variety and/or limited use of differentiated strategies to engage a wide range of student interests, abilities and learning needs; e) staff do not receive feedback on instructional practices.
Meets standard	The school exhibits the following characteristics: a) the curriculum is implemented in the majority of classrooms according to its design; b) as delivered, instruction is focused on core learning objectives; c) the pace of instruction/lessons and content delivery possesses the appropriate rigor and challenge; d) instructional activities possess variety and/or use of differentiated strategies to engage a wide range of student interests, abilities and learning needs; e) supplies sufficient feedback to staff on instructional practices.

No significant concerns were found.

Classroom observations of nine classroom teachers revealed that 100% (or 9 out of 9) instructors were implementing the curriculum as it was described in their lesson plans (indicator a). A comparison of these lesson plans to the curriculum maps provided showed that the lesson plan maintained the core learning objectives, which were also reflected in the classroom lessons as delivered in 100% of classrooms. Classroom objectives were clearly posted in all of the classrooms observed, and an examination of the lesson plans provided clearly showed core objectives for the lesson, either in the form of objectives or “students will be able to” (SWBAT’s). The pace of instruction and content delivery was of the appropriate rigor in all of the classes in which it was applicable (8 out of 9) (indicator c). Differentiated instruction was seen in 6 out of 9 classes (indicator d). The teaching staff reported that they received sufficient feedback on instructional practices (indicator e) from school leadership, and also noting that they received consistent feedback from peers. Regarding the RISE system, they stated that they were given good feedback after classroom observations were performed by The Excel Center leadership, and that formal observations would begin next semester. The teaching staff fully understand the RISE system, having covered it during professional development. Additionally, a different domain within the RISE system was being covered during the Friday professional development sessions, with the leadership team going over the indicators for that domain in detail.

Areas of Strength: The quality of instruction was uniformly high, with a commendable focus on core learning objectives seen in the classroom.

Recommendations: Additional opportunities to improve the use of differentiated instruction would benefit both staff and students.

4.3 For secondary students, does the school provide sufficient guidance on and support and preparation for post-secondary options?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in two or more of the following areas: a) the school's academic program lacks challenging coursework (e.g., Advanced Placement courses, internships, independent study) to prepare students for rigorous post-secondary opportunities; b) there is a lack of high expectations to motivate and prepare students for post-secondary academic opportunities; c) insufficient material resources and personnel guidance are available to inform students of post-secondary options; d) limited opportunities exist for extracurricular engagement and activities (e.g., athletics, academic clubs, vocational) to increase post-secondary options; e) the school does not meet Indiana Core 40 graduation standard requirements.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in one of the following areas: a) the school's academic program lacks challenging coursework (e.g., Advanced Placement courses, internships, independent study) to prepare students for rigorous post-secondary opportunities; b) there is a lack of high expectations to motivate and prepare students for post-secondary academic opportunities; c) insufficient material resources and personnel guidance are available to inform students of post-secondary options; d) limited opportunities exist for extracurricular engagement and activities (e.g., athletics, academic clubs, vocational) to increase post-secondary options; e) the school does not meet Indiana Core 40 graduation standard requirements.
Meets standard	The school: a) has challenging coursework (e.g., Advanced Placement courses, internships, independent study) to prepare students for rigorous post-secondary opportunities; b) has high expectations to motivate and prepare students for post-secondary academic opportunities; c) has sufficient material resources and personnel guidance available to inform students of post-secondary options; d) presents opportunities for extracurricular engagement and activities (e.g., athletics, academic clubs, vocational) to increase post-secondary options; e) meets or exceeds Indiana Core 40 graduation standard requirements.

No significant concerns were found.

The common curriculum shared across the four Excel Center sites meets or exceeds the Core 40 graduation requirements, and students are encouraged to excel and move ahead in their goal of attaining a high school diploma (indicator e).

The focus on post-secondary opportunities at The Excel Centers includes job placement, technical or associates degrees, or attending community or 4-year colleges. The Excel Centers have made great progress in providing opportunities for their students to achieve certifications in career areas that are currently showing growth in job opportunities. Currently, Excel Center students have the opportunity to complete certification programs in Forklift Operation, Pharmacy Technician, Certified Nurse's Assistant, Early Childhood, CompTIA A+, Safety and Manufacturing Logistics, and Hire Technology (through Conexis). In addition to the certifications requiring challenging coursework, students are also encouraged to pursue high-level college coursework through the A+ system (indicators a & d). In addition to the valuable certifications, The Excel Centers are working toward providing students with opportunities for internships at local businesses.

The Excel Center-West has high expectations for their students in regard to post-secondary academic and vocational opportunities (indicator b), and provides students with adequate staff and materials to inform them of post-secondary options (indicator c). The College and Career Coach at The Excel Center-West Ms. Katy Morgan, works with the Life Coaches and the teaching staff to

ensure that all students have access to the support and the information they need to make the most of their Excel Center experience. Ms. Morgan provides a number of vital services for students, from helping them to schedule their classes, to working with them on soft skills, educating them on certification choices, and updating the Graduate Tracker online data program. She also oversees the Senior Seminar, a course in college readiness that all graduating students are required to take, to ensure that the course is meeting the needs of students. This college and career readiness course is taught by different faculty members each semester, but included in the course is resume and cover letter writing, interviewing skills, post-secondary planning and preparation, and professional dress and behavior.

In addition to providing Excel students with the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and professional certification, The Excel Centers also offering their students education in the “soft skills” that they may lack. Many Excel Center students have benefitted from this new focus on the skills needed to interview successfully, behave professionally, and retain a job once employed. One of the tools used to determine students’ soft skills is the Professional & Interpersonal Competencies Assessment (PICA), a rubric for evaluating students based on characteristics such as “grit,” “adaptability,” “Emotional Intelligence,” as well as attendance and goal setting, with a member of the staff who knows the student well assigning the scores. The scale used runs from 0 (Never) to 3 (Always) on items such as “Grit: persistently working towards completion of goals in spite of obstacles, difficulties or discouragement.” The information from the PICA is always shared with the student and is often used as a jumping off point for discussions of the student’s readiness for the transition between the Life Coaches and the College and Career (or Grad) Coaches.

An innovation developed at The Excel Center-West, that is currently being explored at other sites, is the Graduation Team. Each graduating senior has a Graduation Team made up of teachers, school leaders and staff members, who are there to encourage and support them as they approach graduation. Graduation Teams include the entire staff-- Administrative Assistants, Coaches, Teachers and the School Directors will all join in supporting and celebrating Excel Center-West students as they approach graduation. The Graduation Teams are formed when a student is 2-3 semesters from graduation and is designed to show the potential graduate that they are supported by the entire community--- they are "everybody's graduates."

Because of the unique nature of The Excel Center students, there is very little attention paid to extra-curricular activities such as athletics and clubs, and a pressing need for extracurricular activities was not expressed by the students or noted by the staff (indicator d). The Excel Center does provide activities that relate to college and career success, such as campus trips to local universities and colleges, career fairs, and family-oriented social events hosted by The Excel Center sites.

Areas of Strength: The staff at The Excel Center-West is helpful and supportive of the students achieving their goal of earning a high school diploma, and equally important, the staff encourages the students to set ambitious goals for their lives after they have their diploma.

Recommendations: None at this time.

4.4. Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in two or more of the following areas: a) standardized and/or classroom assessments are not accurate or useful measures of established learning standards/objectives; b) assessment results are not received by classroom teachers in a timely or useful manner to influence instructional decisions; c) assessments lack sufficient variety to guide instruction for a wide range of student learning abilities; d) there is limited frequency or use of assessments to inform instructional decisions effectively; e) assessment results are not used to guide instruction or make adjustments to curriculum.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in one of the following areas: a) standardized and/or classroom assessments are not accurate or useful measures of established learning standards/objectives; b) assessment results are not received by classroom teachers in a timely or useful manner to influence instructional decisions; c) assessments lack sufficient variety to guide instruction for a wide range of student learning abilities; d) there is limited frequency or use of assessments to inform instructional decisions effectively; e) assessment results are not used to guide instruction or make adjustments to curriculum.
Meets standard	The school: a) standardized and/or classroom assessments are accurate and useful measures of established learning standards/objectives; b) assessment results are received by classroom teachers in a timely and useful manner to influence instructional decisions; c) assessments have sufficient variety to guide instruction for a wide range of student learning abilities; d) there is sufficient frequency or use of assessments to inform instructional decisions effectively; e) assessment results are used to guide instruction or make adjustments to curriculum.

No significant concerns were found.

The Excel Center-West effectively uses standardized assessments throughout a student's education. The TABE standardized assessment is administered to each student during the iExcel orientation process, and that data is used to design a remediation plan (if necessary) and the student's course schedule. There is an effective focus on the End-of-Course Assessments, and if students are required to take or retake the test the data from their previous testing is used to better prepare them for the test. These results are shared with both the teaching and coaching staff and are provided in time to be useful in planning the best educational course for each individual student (indicator b).

In addition to using standardized testing data, summative assessments based on the common Excel Center curriculum are administered by all classroom instructors. Classroom instructors design their own ongoing assessments and exams that are given with sufficient frequency to inform instructional decisions (indicator d). Further, each course assesses students' knowledge of the course objectives and standards using a common final exam that is administered at all of The Excel Center sites. These final exams are written by the staff teaching in each course area across all The Excel Center sites and are based upon the core learning objectives and goals that are laid out in the common curriculum map. The process of examining test items described in Standard 4.1 also serves to ensure that assessments are accurate and useful measures of established learning standards (indicator a). The exams are reviewed and updated as needed, with any revisions to the exams, or to the courses themselves, reviewed by Mrs Rummel. The results of the exams are used to inform curricular adjustments at each Excel Center site, as well as in the curriculum being implemented across all sites.

The teaching staff meets periodically on Fridays to examine student data and to review the current curriculum. If several members of the teaching staff note the same trend in the data, an adjustment is made to the system-wide curriculum map and that revised curriculum map is sent to all the instructors teaching that course (indicator e). This process is well designed and is particularly important to the success of The Excel Center. This curricular revision based on student data appears to be an ongoing process at The Excel Center and allows for the flexibility needed to maintain the responsiveness of the curriculum.

In addition to the written exams administered as part of the overall course curriculum, the teaching staff reported that they are encouraged to use a variety of assessments (indicator c). The teaching staff described a process of data use that incorporates their classroom assessments with data from SRI, Acuity, and Accuplacer, which is then combined to form data trackers for each student and master trackers for the classrooms and The Excel Center-West. In a very effective example of both data use to longitudinally track student progress and to encourage communication between colleagues, the teaching staff at The Excel Center maintain an electronic spreadsheet on each student, with testing data and skills achieved recorded. They use this spreadsheet during their courses, update the data as appropriate, and then send it on to the next teacher. As was noted by one teacher, "if there is something special about the student they will communicate that in individual notes," while another teacher related that these spreadsheets are "a great snapshot—I have a picture of the strengths and weaknesses of each student, so I can tweak my instruction for him from day one of the course."

The informal and formal assessment data collected by the classroom instructors is also used to adjust the pacing of the curriculum for both individual classes and across classes in common subject areas (indicator e). As one teacher noted, "No 8 weeks are the same. The students will drive the pace of the class. If they come in strong we will push them and if they come in not as strong we will teach in a different way—the process will be different. We know this from the data coming in with the student."

Areas of Strength: Assessment results at The Excel Center are used to revise the curriculum in a very responsive and effective fashion. The system currently in place allows for flexibility in curriculum based on student data, but also ensures that there is a framework in place to provide a quality curriculum.

Recommendations: None at this time.

4.5. Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas: a) hiring processes are not organized to support the success of new staff members; b) inefficient or insufficient deployment of faculty and staff limits instructional time and capacity; c) faculty and staff are not certified/trained in areas to which they are assigned; d) professional development (PD) does not relate to demonstrated needs for instructional improvement; e) PD is not determined through analyses of student attainment and improvement; f) the teacher evaluation plan is not explicit and regularly implemented with a clear process and criteria.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) hiring processes are not organized to support the success of new staff members; b) inefficient or insufficient deployment of faculty and staff limits instructional time and capacity; c) faculty and staff are not certified/trained in areas to which they are assigned; d) professional development (PD) does not relate to demonstrated needs for instructional improvement; e) PD is not determined through analyses of student attainment and improvement; f) the teacher evaluation plan is not explicit and regularly implemented with a clear process and criteria.
Meets standard	The school exhibits the following characteristics: a) hiring processes are organized and used to support the success of new staff members; b) the school deploys sufficient number of faculty and staff to maximize instructional time and capacity; c) faculty and staff are certified/trained in areas to which they are assigned; d) professional development (PD) is related to demonstrated needs for instructional improvement; e) PD opportunities are determined through analyses of student attainment and improvement; f) the teacher evaluation plan is explicit and regularly implemented with a clear process and criteria.

No significant concerns were found.

All teachers at The Excel Center-West are certified or credentialed in their teaching area, or have the appropriate licensure to teach. The teachers are teaching a course load that is manageable, and the various staff members have distinct roles (indicator b). The teachers are all teaching in areas in which they are certified (indicator c). Overall, the staff is deployed to best utilize their skills and training (indicator b). The hiring process used at The Excel Center-West are the same as those used across the network, and provide a solid foundation for finding teachers that will fit into the unique teaching environment. New teachers are provided with professional development and mentoring to support their success (indicator a).

Professional development for the teaching staff at The Excel Center-West occurs during regular meetings across all the sites. During focus group interviews the teachers described a series of professional development opportunities that ranged from The Excel Center conference that included all staff and leadership from The Excel Center sites gathering to discuss best-practices in adult education and credit recovery, to Friday afternoon meetings at each site attended by the teaching and coaching staff where individual student needs are discussed. The teaching staff reported that they found all the professional development activities provided by The Excel Centers to be valuable and to move them forward professionally. The staff particularly noted the opportunities for their own development as teachers afforded to them by the curriculum revision. The noted that they felt integral to the ramp up to the new standards and that they benefitted from

"working out the skeleton of the curriculum.. we know we will be able to continue to develop it." The noted that during the professional development offerings "the staff comes together and someone will lead or present what they are strong in and then we will do breakout sessions." In response to the needs of the student body at The Excel Center-West, professional development in English as a Second Language has become part of the professional development offerings at The Excel Center-West, with SIOP training being offered (indicator d).

The Excel Center is already implementing the RISE evaluation program, and focus group interviews and discussions with school leaders revealed that the staff and leadership are happy with the frequency and content of the teacher evaluation system (indicator f).

Areas of Strength: The leadership has developed a very effective hiring process that has allowed them to hire a staff of dedicated and mission-driven instructors.

Recommendations: No concerns at this time.

4.6. Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>both</u> of the following areas: a) significant disagreements exist among stakeholders about the school's mission; b) there is a lack of widespread knowledge and commitment to the intentions of the school's mission.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) significant disagreements exist among stakeholders about the school's mission; b) there is a lack of widespread knowledge and commitment to the intentions of the school's mission.
Meets standard	The school: a) has a mission that is shared by all stakeholders; b) has stakeholders possessing widespread knowledge and commitment to the intentions of the school's mission.

No significant concerns were found.

Focus group interviews with staff, students, and leadership revealed that all stakeholders in The Excel Center are knowledgeable and committed to the school's mission (indicators a & b). Interviews with stakeholders revealed that they fully understand and agree with The Excel Center mission to provide students who have found it difficult to finish their high school diploma with the opportunity to finish their diploma in an environment that is flexible and respectful of their needs, takes into consideration the stresses of work and family, and can accommodate students who need three credits to graduate as well as those who only have three credits completed.

Teachers, students, Life Coaches and leadership were all asked about the school mission, and each responded in ways that made it very clear that The Excel Center-West has a student focused staff that not only supports students, but is heavily invested, professionally and emotionally, in the success of their students. A sampling of the statements made when asked what the mission of The Excel Center-West easily conveys the dedication of the staff and students: "The mission of all The Excel Centers is to give opportunities to those who want a second chance," "People who may have failed the first time and realize that they need to come back, we eliminate the excuses—car, baby, can't do the work---If you feel you have no options The Excel Center is there for you." In addition to the mission of helping individual students, The Excel Center staff see their mission as improving the city by "developing a great product for the city---Quality employees with soft skills and life skills," and "Us being here will have a huge impact on the community-- the low wage workers can get higher paying jobs, start businesses, and can totally change a community," " We are breaking the cycle of poverty ---the students will spend hours helping their children. They learn while teaching their own children." Finally, one teacher noted "We will meet them all where they are... and get them to the end result."

Areas of Strength: The School Mission is compelling and reflects what is happening every day at The Excel Center. The teachers are fully committed to the school vision, and both teaching staff and school leadership are in agreement as to the vision of the school.

Recommendations: None at this time.

4.7. Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas with no evidence of a credible plan to address them: a) The school does not have clearly stated rules that enforce positive behavior; b) the school's discipline approach does not possess high expectations for student behavior; c) interactions between faculty and students are disrespectful and/or unsupportive and there are non-existing or unclear processes for resolution of conflicts; d) interactions between faculty and administration are unprofessional and/or unproductive.
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas with no evidence of a credible plan to address it: a) The school does not have clearly stated rules that enforce positive behavior; b) the school's discipline approach does not possess high expectations for student behavior; c) interactions between faculty and students are disrespectful and/or unsupportive and there are non-existing or unclear processes for resolution of conflicts; d) interactions between faculty and administration are unprofessional and /or unproductive.
Meets standard	The school exhibits the following characteristics: a) the school has clearly stated rules that enforce positive behavior; b) the school's discipline approach possesses high expectations for student behavior; c) interactions between faculty and students are respectful and supportive and faculty and students are clear about processes for resolution of conflicts; d) interactions between faculty and administration are professional and constructive.

No significant concerns were found.

The Excel Center-West leadership and staff have created an environment that fully supports and encourages the success of their students. Interactions between faculty and students are respectful and supportive, and most importantly, conducive to the success of each individual student. The student culture is one of hard work, support for each other, and a focus on the goal of the high school diploma. The students at The Excel Center are, for the most part, adults who are there by choice and they recognize that this is a unique opportunity to finish their education.

Essential to the school climate at the Excel Center-West are the role of the Life Coaches. During focus group interviews with the Coaches they described their role as "taking people from a place of doubt to their end goal." They described their role as that of a support team for the students and the teachers as well. The Coaches' relationship with the students begins on the first day of each student's education at The Excel Center-West. They describe the process as "pushing into classes to check on students during pop-ins." Another noted that "I will see students off task and talk to them," while another noted that "we know all the students. At the beginning of the semester we will do the First Friday when it's just the new students and meet them and put faces to names." The Coaches are particularly valuable during the "Productivity Meetings" that are held when a student is not progressing in their classwork as they should. During these meetings the student, the Coach, lead teachers, and The Excel Center-West leadership meet to set goals to help the student improve. In this way, students who are struggling receive guidance to help them improve. It is the Coach's role in this process to provide the student with support and encouragement. The Coaches also play a vital role in the Graduation Teams, as well as supporting students as they work on their class schedules. Finally, the Coaches play a vital communicative role for the teachers, the Graduation Teams, and the school leadership. The Life Coaches are often the first person that a student will confide in when

they encounter difficulties in achieving their goals. As one Coach explained, "We've learned through following up with students that relationships are everything and we try to establish them sooner—that's why we do the first Friday event—if they are connected they will communicate about the barriers that might be stopping them from finishing." Another Coach noted that, "They (the students) want us to call or email...we want them to know that there is no reason to stop coming and we will find ways that they can overcome the barriers. If you call or email—they will say "I've never had someone try this hard to keep me in school!" It's our way of saying I care about you and I know that you need this."

There is a common Code of Conduct in place at all Excel Center sites, with each Director given the leeway to adapt the implementation of the code to their specific needs. It is the Coaches' responsibility to ensure that the students understand the Code of Conduct and that they know what is acceptable and what is not (indicator a & b). The Code of Conduct has been rarely enforced, as the students tend to value the opportunities available at The Excel Center-West, and stay on task during the school day. Informal observations during the site visit revealed that both during class and in the hallways during passing period, the students are all friendly, outgoing and working well together. Passing period at The Excel Center-West is particularly interesting in that in the course of walking down the crowded hallways at least 5 different languages were heard: English, Spanish, French, Arabic and possibly Urdu. Students of many different ethnicities, religions and nationalities are all supporting each other as they work toward their goal of a high school diploma.

Interactions between faculty and leadership at The Excel Center-West are professional and constructive (indicator d). The teaching staff reported that Mr. Gates is responsive to their needs and provides great leadership at The Excel Center-West site.

Areas of Strength: The staff at The Excel Center-West have created a school culture that fosters respect and individual growth. As a consequence, staff, students and the school leadership are all in agreement regarding the positive behaviors expected of the students. The students themselves strive to create a positive school culture; very few disciplinary incidents have been noted.

Recommendations: None at this time.

4.8. Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?	
Does not meet standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas: a) there is a lack of active and ongoing communication between the school and parents; b) school communication is neither timely nor relevant to the parental concerns; c) student academic progress and achievement reports are not clearly reported and/or misunderstood; d) the school's communication methods are not well-designed to meet the needs of a diverse set of parents (e.g., not communicating in parents' native languages, communicating only in writing when many parents cannot read, holding meetings at inconvenient times for parents).
Approaching standard	The school presents significant concerns in <u>one</u> of the following areas: a) there is a lack of active and ongoing communication between the school and parents; b) school communication is neither timely nor relevant to the parental concerns; c) student academic progress and achievement reports are not clearly reported and/or misunderstood; d) the school's communication methods are not well-designed to meet the needs of a diverse set of parents (e.g., not communicating in parents' native languages, communicating only in writing when many parents cannot read, holding meetings at inconvenient times for parents).
Meets standard	The school: a) has active and ongoing communication between the school and parents; b) utilizes communications that are both timely and relevant to the parental concerns; c) communicates student academic progress and achievement in reports that are understood by parents; d) the school's communication methods are designed to meet the needs of a diverse set of parents (e.g., communicating in parents' native languages, not communicating only in writing when many parents cannot read, holding meetings at convenient times for parents).

The student population of The Excel Center is predominantly over 18, and there are very few whose parents are involved in their education, consequently this particular standard does not apply to The Excel Center as a whole.

4.9. Do the school's special education files demonstrate that it is in legal compliance and is moving towards best practice?	
Does not meet standard	The school's special education files present concerns in <u>two or more</u> of the following areas: a) services outlined within Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) do not adequately match the exceptional needs of the student; b) each need identified within the IEP does not have a corresponding goal and plan for assessment; c) all goals are not rigorous or based on state or national learning standards; d) evidence does not demonstrate that goals have evolved each year as the student developed; e) specifically designed curriculum is not outlined.
Approaching standard	The school's special education files present concerns in <u>one</u> or more of the following areas: a) services outlined within Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) do not adequately match the exceptional needs of the student; b) each need identified within the IEP does not have a corresponding goal and plan for assessment; c) all goals are not rigorous or based on state or national learning standards; d) evidence does not demonstrate that goals have evolved each year as the student developed; e) specifically designed curriculum is not outlined.
Meets standard	All of the following are evident in the school's special education files: a) services outlined within Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) adequately match the exceptional needs of the student; b) each need identified within the IEP has a corresponding goal and plan for assessment; c) each goal is rigorous and is based on state and national learning standards; d) explicit evidence exists to demonstrate that goals have evolved each year as the student develops; e) specifically designed curriculum is outlined.

This report compiles a review of all practices and procedures specific to special education services at the Excel Center West (ECW). The results of this evaluation are based on the following pieces of data collected onsite: classroom observations, review of internal processes and procedural manuals, interviews with general education and special education staff, students with IEPs, review of 25% of IEPs housed at ECW, DOE data bases, ECW website, and follow up interviews with families of students with IEPs at ECW.

All of the following are evident in the school's special education files: (a) services outlined within Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) adequately match the exceptional needs of the student; (b) each need identified within the IEP has a corresponding goal and plan for assessment; (c) each goal is rigorous and is based on state and national learning standards; (d) explicit evidence exists to demonstrate that goals have evolved each year as the student develops; (e) specifically designed curriculum is outlined.

Excel Center West is in the early stages of its development. The support of the Excel Centers is apparent, so even in it's early days of operation ECW is doing well in the area of special education. Having the benefit of resources, support, and structure is a plus. While ECW only has a few students with IEPs, it does have a high population of students with a variety of learning needs. Currently, ECW meets all the indicators outlined in standard 4.9.

4.10. Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to students with limited English proficiency?	
Does not meet standard	The school is <u>not</u> fulfilling its legal obligations regarding ESL students, and requires substantial improvement in order to achieve conditions such as the following: a) appropriate staff have a clear understanding of current legislation research and effective practices relating to the provision of ESL services; b) relationships with students, parents, and external providers that are well-managed and comply with law and regulation.
Approaching standard	The school is not yet completely fulfilling all of its legal obligations regarding ESL students, and requires <i>some</i> (but not considerable) improvement to fully achieve conditions such as the following: a) appropriate staff have a clear understanding of current legislation, research and effective practices relating to the provision of ESL services; b) relationships with students, parents, and external providers that are well-managed and comply with law and regulation.
Meets standard	The school is fulfilling its legal obligations regarding ESL students, as indicated by conditions such as the following: a) appropriate staff have a clear understanding of current legislation, research and effective practices relating to the provision of ESL services; b) relationships with students, parents, and external providers that are well-managed and comply with law and regulation.

No significant concerns were found.

Given the multicultural nature of the student body at The Excel Center-West, instruction of ENL students is a topic that is very much in the forefront. The Excel Center-West does not currently have fulltime ESL coordinator, so the leadership and the teaching staff, with the support of Goodwill Educational Initiatives, are providing ESL services. The support from GEI is being provided by Mrs. Rummel, and Ms. Quin Fretske, who is the ESL coordinator for The Excel Center-Decatur. Ms. Fretske is very knowledgeable in current legislation regarding the education of ESL students and is familiar with Indiana's English Language Proficiency Standards. Ms. Fretske reported that she has participated in professional development opportunities relating to effective best practices in the field of ESL through the Indiana Department of Education in ESL education, as well as several webinars on the topic.

Ms. Fretske and Mrs. Rummel are also very familiar with the Indiana Department of Education Office of English Language Learning & Migrant Education Guidelines to Satisfy Legal Requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. With the guidance of Ms. Fretske and Mrs. Rummel, effective ESL practices are being used at The Excel Center-West is in compliance with these standards. Specifically, The Excel Center-West ESL students are initially self-identified based on their answers to the Home Language Survey. Once they have been identified, they are administered the CLAS-E TABE test, which identifies their level of proficiency. This testing occurs within the mandated 30 days. Students are placed into the appropriate courses, regardless of their language competency, using the same process applied to all of The Excel Center students. The Excel Center-West students are provided with both push-in and pull-out services, and supports and services are provided to help with their socio-emotional adjustments as well (indicator a). Specific programs currently being used to educate the ESL students and provide remediation for them are System 44 and READ 180.

Mrs. Rummel also ensures that relationships with students, parents and external providers are well-managed and comply with the law (indicator b). As noted above, The Excel Center-West provides services that comply with Indiana state law, as well as with the standards and best practices required by the Indiana Department of Education.

Appendix A:

Nine classroom observations were performed on site using the classroom observation instrument provided by the Office of Education Innovation. The on site observations lasted approximately 30 minutes, and over half of the teaching staff was observed once. Classroom observers spent 4.65 hours (279 minutes) observing 9 classrooms, 127 students, and 9 teachers. On average, each observation lasted 31 minutes and the observed student to teacher ratio was 14:1. Two of the teachers were observed by both classroom observers at the same time in order to ensure inter-judge reliability.

Classroom Environment

100% (9/9) had posted objectives. 22.2% (2/9) had posted state standards. 88.8% (8/9) used critical vocabulary. 88.8% (8/9) had challenging content. 66.6% (6/9) exhibited differentiation. 88.8% (8/9) of the instruction observed built on prior knowledge.

Learning Environment

The observers categorized observed learning experiences into four main categories. 100.0% (9/9) of observed activities were Remember/Understand Activities. 100% (9/9) were Apply/Perform Activities. 0% (0/9) were Analyze/Evaluate Activities. 0% (0/9) were Create/Design Activities. 0% (0/9) of activities were found to be ineffective.

66.6% (6/9) of classrooms contained rich print materials. 66.6% (6/9) showed examples of exemplary work. 55.5% (5/9) displayed a daily schedule. 88.8% (8/9) had posted behavior expectations. 11.1% (1/9) had culturally relevant materials.

Behavior Management

The site team observed proactive and reactive techniques. The site team recorded 8 (88.8%) classrooms using proactive discipline. 9 (100%) classrooms using reactive discipline were recorded. Student engagement varied widely. Please see the table below.

Site Visit Classroom Observations

Topic of Lesson	
Hinduism/Buddhism	Russian Revolution
Variables	World History
Exam Review	Equivalent fractions
Math Operations	Geometry Angles
Ranges	

Proportion of Students Engaged During:	All		Most		Half		Few		None	
	#	% Total	#	% Total	#	% Total	#	% Total	#	% Total
First Interval	9	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Second Interval	6	67%	3	33%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Third Interval	6	67%	3	33%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%